Body Found in Spain Thought to Be American Once Jailed by Prague

By JOHN W. FINNEY

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 11—A badly decomposed body was discovered in September in a gully in the southern Spanish countryside, thus apparently bringing to an end the life story of a Cambridge, Mass., travel agent once accused of espionage by Czechoslovakia.

The body was identified by Spanish police as that of Vladimir Kazan-Komarek, a Czech-born American citizen who was seized by the Czechoslovak secret police in October 1966, when a Soviet airliner made an unscheduled stop in Prague.

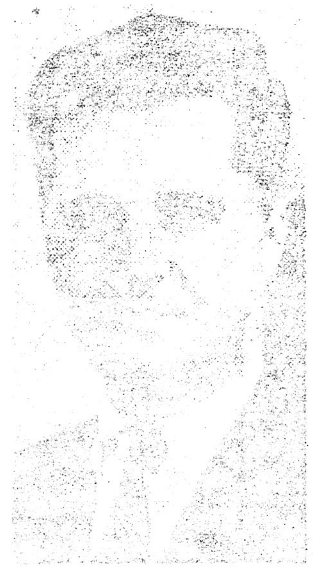
He was charged with high treason and espionage, but then, after considerable diplomatic pressure by the United States, he was convicted by a Czechoslovak court of a lesser charge of subversive activities against Czechoslovakia and was expelled from the country.

Political Murder Doubted

The details of Mr. Kazan-Komarek's death are still trickling into the State Department from its consulate in Seville. From all the information obtained thus far, however, it does not appear to Department officials—or to the Spanish police—that the dead man had been the victim of a cloak-and-dagger murder.

The judgment of the Spanish police, supported by a finding of a Spanish court in Marbella last month, was that he died "a natural death due to unknown reasons." The police reported that the body showed "no signs of violence."

The body was so badly decomposed, according to the Spanish police, that the cause of death as well as identity was difficult to establish. The only means of identification used by the Spanish police was papers in a billfold next to the body, bearing the name of Vladimir Kazan-Komarek and a key fitting his apartment door.



Associated Press

Vladimir Kazan-Komarek

The body was discovered on Sept. 7 in a hillside gully on a farm outside Estepona, a small Spanish town on the Mediterranean coast where Mr. Kazan-Komarek had been living since November, 1971. The estimate of the Spanish police, who had the body buried after a perfunctory autopsy in a cemetery in Estepona, was that death had occurred two months earlier.

Some major details of his death at the age of 48, however, remain as obscure as his background—as a refugee who boasted that he had set up an anti-Communist underground organization in Czechoslovakia and who, as an adventurer, risked his life ferrying small planes across the Atlantic and the Pacific.

A prisoner of the Nazis during World War II, Mr. Kazan-Komarek worked briefly for the United States Army in Germany in 1945 and 1946 before returning to Czechoslovakia. He fled Czechoslovakia in 1948 after the Communist take-over, lived in Paris until 1950, and then came to the United States, where he married, became a citizen and [illegible] president of the Harvard Travel Service on Harvard Square in Cambridge.

On Oct. 31, 1966, when he was returning from a conference of travel agents in Moscow sponsored by Intourist, the Soviet Government tourist agency, the Soviet airliner on which he was traveling — supposedly on a nonstop flight to Paris — made an unscheduled stop in Prague — for "mechanical reasons."

Mr. Kazan-Komarek was taken off the plane and charged by Czechoslovak authorities with setting up and operating an underground espionage and terrorist network in Czechoslovakia from 1948 to 1950 that was responsible for the death of a policeman.

Earlier Czechoslovak press reports dating from 1951, had characterized Mr. Kazan-Komarek as an agent of United States Army Counterintelligence and had linked him to the Prague bureau of the Associated Press, which the Czechoslovak Government had charged was a center for espionage. William N. Oatis, the chief of the news service's bureau, was jailed for two years in Prague on espionage charges in the early nineteen-fifties.

Earlier Charge Dropped

During Mr. Kazan-Komarek's trial early in 1967, the earlier charge that he had been an American intelligence agent was quietly dropped by the Czechoslovak authorities, and instead it was suggested that he had been linked to a French intelligence organization that was never identified.

After his release, brought about largely through the intervention with Czechoslovak authorities by Senator Edward M. Kennedy, Mr. Kazan-Komarek said that the charges against him had been partly true, that he had helped people escape from Czechoslovakia and that he believed he had been working for "French intelligence."

In the last few years, he severed his relationship with Harvard Travel Service, and in October 1971, he went to Europe, leaving his wife and five children at their home in Wellesley, Mass.

A Flat on Spanish Coast

He appeared in the town of Estepona, on the Mediterranean coast near Gibraltar, in November, 1971, where he set up quarters alone in a small flat. The Spanish police reported that he led a "very normal life," working on a book about pilot safety and occasionally ferrying small planes to new owners.

On June 5, the United States consulate in Seville was informed by Samuel Berman, an American living in Estepona, that Mr. Kazan-Komerek had been missing since May 11. About that time, Mr. Kazan-Komarek had been scheduled to make a trip to the United States with Mr. and Mrs. R. A. Duncan, a Canadian couple living in Estepona.

The consulate discounted the missing-persons report filed by Mr Berman after it was informed by the Spanish police that Mr. Kazan-Komerek had been seen during the first week of June.

Body's Discovery Not Reported

For reasons that the State Department cannot explain, the consulate also did not report the discovery of the body by the Spanish police in September. It was only after the Duncans wrote to Mrs. Kazan-Komarek at the end of October that the State Department learned of the death.

In interviews with State Department representatives, the Duncans expressed some doubt that the body was that of Mr. Kazan-Komarek. One of the questions they raised—which the State Department thus far has not been able to answer—was whether the teeth had been removed from the body for positive identification. State Department officials said that Mrs. Kazan-Komarek's permission would be required to exhume the body to determine if the teeth were still there.

The Duncans also discounted any theory of suicide, reporting that Mr. Kazan-Komarek, before his disappearance, had been cheerful and had showed no signs of despondency.

Found near his body was a small empty bottle of aspirin.

State Department officials said there was no indication that Mr. Kazan-Komarek might still have been involved in intelligence work, and they insisted he had not been employed by any United States intelligence agency.

Mrs. Kazan-Komarek, in a telephone interview, declined to discuss her husband's death. But on one point she was emphatic. When asked whether Mr. Kazan-Komarek might have been involved in intelligence work, she replied: "Oh Lord, no!"